

Reske had to have it all

UMass star wouldn't give up basketball while pursuing grueling nursing program

By Monique Walker
GLOBE STAFF

Kristen Reske strolled into the gymnasium at Stonehill College recently, wearing a pair of white furry boots. She isn't afraid of fashion. When she steps out, she likes to do it with style, even to watch her alma mater Sacred Heart in the Division 4 girls' basketball final.

Reske, a Duxbury native, says she considers herself a "girly girl," but on the court it's a different story. The 5-foot-5-inch guard is a powerhouse, setting records this winter on the University of Massachusetts-Boston women's basketball team.

The UMass senior ended her college career as the school's all-time leading 3-point shooter (149). She tied for the school lead in games played (102), and her free-throw percentage (.754) is the second-most accurate in school history.

And she has court recognition in another way: She sang the national anthem at almost every home game for the last four years.

"Over the years it was crazy at times," Reske said. "There were times when I would say to myself, 'I don't know if I can do everything.'"

For the past four years, Reske balanced basketball and a demanding course load toward a nursing degree, which she will complete this summer. When UMass guidance counselors asked Reske to consider giving up basketball before the most challenging portion of the program, she stuck with both.

Reske's choice of UMass came almost by chance.

When Reske was looking around in 2003, she thought about academics first. Basketball would be a bonus. Reske settled on Saint Anselm in New Hampshire. But a few days before classes started, she ran into UMass coach Shawn Renee Polk

at a restaurant in Boston. UMass had been her second choice, and Polk had tried to recruit her, knowing her to be a hard worker with a deadly 3-point shot.

The chance encounter — "I took that as a sign" — prompted her to switch to UMass at the last minute. "I'm glad I did," she says now.

As a freshman, Reske was reserved at first — "You couldn't get her to say anything," said Polk — but became more outgoing as she grew comfortable. It was not long before Reske and teammate Amy Oulette began singing the national anthem together before almost every game. (When Oulette graduated last season, Reske continued singing solo.)

As a junior, Reske was faced with the challenge of balancing playing time with her heavier academic work. But she didn't want to give up her game. "When I was stressed out with school, I had basketball."

Reske also had the support of Polk, who made adjustments to let her out of practice when necessary for clinicals or classes. On game days, if she missed the team bus she would drive to games with her father, Howard. That could mean a 2-hour, 15-minute drive to Maine after taking a critical exam.

"I didn't mind as long as I made it to the game," said Reske, "I didn't care how I got there."

The schedule Reske kept was not something that just any student could master, Polk said. Reske found time to accomplish her class work and, if she missed practice, she would work in a 45-minute cardio session.

"She's very committed and you know that right away," Polk said. "I knew if I let her out of practice I was still going to get 110 percent out of her the next day."

On the court, Reske made free throws a priority. She could hear her father in the back of her head griping about missed



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free throws. "How do you miss free throws? It's free," Reske recalls him saying.

In her senior year, Reske had the opportunity to play against her younger sister, Kim, who also wears No. 23, at Curry College. UMass won, but Reske said it was a great experience even though she and her sister guarded each other in the game.

Reske's senior season ended with UMass completing its best season in more than 20 years with a 15-11 record. And Polk considers Reske a critical part of that success. "I'm going to miss her dearly. There are just some players you know in your mind and in your heart will never be replaced, and she is one of those players."

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UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS

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